

**IMPLEMENTING AN EMPLOYEE REWARD OR RECOGNITION PROGRAM WITH  
A UNIONIZED LABOR FORCE**

Executive Leadership

BY: William J. Shaw, Chief  
Solon Fire Rescue  
Solon, Ohio

An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy as part of the Executive Fire  
Officer Program

December 2001

## **ABSTRACT**

In order to meet the future challenges faced by modern fire service organizations, the employees must be motivated. This research project identified the advantages of implementing a reward and recognition program in order to motivate employees to be their best, thus providing the best possible level of service to the community.

Historical, action and descriptive research was used to (a) identify how other area fire departments utilize a reward or recognition program, (b) identify if Solon Fire Rescue personnel feel there is adequate recognition for their contributions to the organization, (c) identify what types of recognition tools would be most desirable to Solon Fire Rescue personnel, and (d) identify potential negatives to implementing a reward and recognition program.

The principle procedure used to gather information was to review existing literature from the fire service concerning employee motivation. Existing literature from business publications concerning employee motivation was also reviewed. Additionally, a telephone survey concerning current reward or recognition programs was conducted involving all fire departments in the Southeast region of Cuyahoga County, Ohio.

The results of the research identified the benefits of implementing a program. A reward or recognition program will help motivate the employee to align their values with the values and the mission of the organization. Additionally, reward or recognition programs can assist with higher employee retention and officer development.

The recommendation is for Solon Fire Rescue to implement an employee reward or recognition program as soon as possible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>PROCEDURES .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>RESULTS .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>APPENDIX A (Phone Survey Results of Fire Departments in Southeast Region Cuyahoga County, Ohio) .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>APPENDIX B (Solon Fire Rescue Reward/Recognition Program Survey) .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>APPENDIX C (Solon Fire Rescue 9-11 Recognition and Reward Program) .....</b>	<b>30</b>

## **INTRODUCTION**

The City of Solon has instituted a merit pay compensation plan for non-unionized municipal employees. This plan does not apply to two groups of employees due to collective bargaining agreements, those in the fire department and police department. There is no program in effect to reward or recognize achievements of unionized employees who make contributions to the organization above the normal expectations of their supervisors.

The purpose of this research project was to identify the advantages and disadvantages of, as well as develop an employee reward or recognition program that was considered desirable by Solon Fire Rescue personnel. Historical, action, and descriptive research was used to answer the following questions:

1. How do other area fire departments utilize a reward or recognition program?
2. Do Solon Fire Rescue personnel feel recognition for their contribution to the organization is currently adequate?
3. What types of recognition tools would be most desirable to Solon Fire Rescue personnel?
4. What are the potential negatives to instituting an achievement recognition program?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The city of Solon is located approximately 20 miles southeast of Cleveland, Ohio. The department serves the city of Solon with full emergency medical and fire suppression services. The department also serves the village of Glenwillow with fire suppression services as part of an enterprise zone agreement. Emergency services delivered to the 23 square mile area comes from 2 stations and includes fire suppression, fire prevention and education, paramedic emergency

medical services, hazardous materials response, and various technical rescue services. 45 career line personnel operating 1 ladder truck, 2 engines, 3 paramedic ambulances, and 1 rescue truck deliver these services.

City of Solon employees are non-unionized except for two groups of employees, both serving in the safety forces. Police officers and supervisory personnel as well as fire fighters and supervisory personnel operate under a collective bargaining agreement. Issues in this agreement are mutually agreed upon and laws of the State of Ohio regulate all procedures. Prior to the pay for performance system being instituted, most city employees would receive the same raises that were secured by the police officers or fire fighters.

Prior to 1999, city department administrators had the ability to recommend a pay increase for employees under their supervision. While most administrators offered whatever the safety forces received through negotiations, there was nothing in place at the time to assist department administrators with determining the pay raise percentages, thus percentages occasionally varied and were highly subjective. Additionally, there was no structured goal setting sessions with the employees, which led to the employee not knowing what needed to be accomplished to attain additional compensation. These percentages were in turn approved by the payroll department with no further review.

In 1999, one department administrator awarded a substantial pay increase to a particular employee. This was done in an effort to bring the employee's compensation up to a level commensurate with their job duties. Eventually, morale in other employees that heard of the substantial pay increase declined. After this situation was brought to the attention of city council members, council commissioned a study by an outside consultant to evaluate the job classifications of city employees and the corresponding rates of pay with the intent of stabilizing

the method pay increases were granted and bringing objectivity to the process. After the study was completed, a pay scale was established for all non-unionized employees and a merit pay system was instituted. This merit pay system is based on the employee meeting performance objectives that are set by the employee and the supervisor.

With the new system in place, employees are eligible for a 1.5%, 3% or 4.5% pay increase based on an evaluation completed by their department administrator. These pay increases are based on meeting goals and objectives mutually set by the employee and the administrator. The objective of this program is to reward employees who achieve their goals and perform at a rate higher compared to those employees who maintain the status quo.

After making minor adjustments to the program, it appears that the system is having moderate success. Based on personal experience, the author can attest to being satisfied and motivated after receiving a substantial pay increase for performance in 2000 based on merit. It remains to be seen if the program will bring success to other city departments.

Almost immediately after the new system was introduced to other non-unionized city employees, many voiced the perceived inequity of the pay increase system compared to how raises were earned by unionized employees. The argument frequently voiced to their department administrators was that fire and police personnel only had to “show up to work” to get their raise as outlined by their contractual agreement with the city while everyone else had to meet performance objectives. This has further eroded morale in some areas and occasionally causes some dissension among employees.

Unsettling as it may be, the statement is true. Unionized employees in the fire and police departments receive pay increases as negotiated in their respective collective bargaining agreement. There is no incentive or motivation for fire or police personnel perform at a level,

other than what is needed to avoid disciplinary situations, in order to obtain a pay increase. This situation is guaranteed by a negotiated contractual agreement and offers no incentive to the employee to act in a manner that would better serve the department or the citizens of the community.

If this situation continues unchecked, morale may continue to erode, particularly with employees who feel they deserve a higher raise than they have been granted. The lowering of morale may lead to unionization of other city departments, thus having more employees covered under collective bargaining agreements. This course of action goes against what the city administration has set forth in trying to entice their employees to be more productive.

Additional background on the lack of ability to reward employees was recently brought to light by an incident within the police department. A police lieutenant allegedly had committed substantial errors in judgment during the process of booking a prisoner in the city jail. During the investigation of the incident, the police lieutenant was placed on paid administrative leave. This struck the author as somewhat odd in that, based on previous experience as a union negotiator, paid time off was an item frequently coveted by the employees and difficult to obtain when dealing with labor negotiations. It appeared, on the surface at least, that an employee must substantially violate rules of good judgment to achieve additional paid leave. In a sense, it appeared that poor behavior was being rewarded.

These situations caused the author to look hard at the system in place for rewarding employees within the Solon Fire Rescue division. Unfortunately, none could be found. While it is true that there is no written expectation of performance within the division, on a comparative basis, some of the members repeatedly perform at a level higher than their peers and receive no reward or recognition for their efforts.

The impact of the current lack of reward or recognition plan is very evident. There have been a number of occasions where opportunities for employees have been made available to perform new job functions in an effort to meet citizen's desires, such as CPR instructor and child safety seat technician. These offerings have been met with mediocre participation. It seems that the majority of the department is satisfied with working at a level in line with the current status quo. This lack of involvement by personnel, if not addressed, could have far reaching detrimental effects on the organization.

The fire service is an extremely dynamic work atmosphere with the demands placed upon our organizations by the citizens changing rapidly. As fire service organizations are expected to provide increased levels of services, they will struggle with the ability to motivate the work force to function and perform some of these non-traditional services. While it is true that some of these issues may be addressed at the bargaining table, financial gain is not the sole motivator of most employees. Many employees also have other areas where satisfaction is required as outlined by Abraham Maslow many years ago. Without a reward or recognition plan, there is a good chance that the organization will stagnate and not progress within the dynamic field of the fire service.

Additionally, failure to progress could be a future-determining factor in the funding arena. As previously stated, citizens are expecting more from the fire service that serves their community. Currently, the city of Solon is financially stable with adequate cash reserves. However, with large construction and infrastructure projects planned, coupled with a declining economy, this may not always be the situation. It is likely that there will be a time when the financial situation is not as solid and additional funding requests from the fire department will be put forth. The fire department must position itself now as a full service organization providing



vital services other than emergency response in order to survive future economic declines. This positioning will be difficult to accomplish without the support of the employees. In order to accomplish these goals, the morale of the work force needs to be sustained at high levels.

To secure its future, the department needs to adjust its culture and that opportunity is presenting itself. The Solon Fire Department is experiencing a growth period at this time. Due to additions and retirements, 8 new personnel are being hired this year. Approval has been secured and planning is complete to open an additional fire station in 2002 that will require the hiring of twelve additional personnel. With these new personnel, more than one third of the department will be newly hired employees. Because of this situation, the opportunity exists to make significant changes to the culture of the department by influencing the new one third of the organization. However, to accomplish this task, the proper tools should be in place. One of these tools should be a reward or recognition program.

As discussed in the Executive Leadership course conducted at the National Fire Academy, influencing styles need to be developed by fire service leaders in order to be effective. A reward or recognition program could be an effective tool, particularly when developing the common vision style of influencing or the participation and trust style of influencing.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review for this research focused on two specific areas. First, a review of private sector publications regarding employee morale and motivation was conducted. Next, a review of fire service publications concerning these same topics was completed.

### Private Sector Publications

The old saying, “the only thing that is constant in the world is change” is applicable to both the public sector and private sector. By reviewing the recent events of September 11, 2001, it has become evident that we must adapt to our changing work environment to survive. How do we as fire service managers try to affect change within our organizations? Key to this answer is to have motivated employees who will cooperate and embrace the necessary changes. “While unmotivated employees are likely to resist or undermine changes, motivated employees embrace changes and find new ways for getting the work done in their new environment.” (Gorden, Bjornlund, and Zahiruddin, 1995, p.1).

Productivity is one of the top concerns of managers, both in the public and private sector. According to Manning and Curtis (1988), there are three steps that should be followed to maximize employee productivity. First, managers should set high performance objectives. Second, accurate feedback on the results should be provided. Third, meaningful rewards should be used to reinforce performance. While this approach appears fairly straight forward, there was much discussion in the literature as to what meaningful rewards are.

While many people think that money is the greatest motivator, however, a significant amount of literature refutes this idea. Luthy (1998) references research completed by Frederick Herzberg who found that money does not motivate employee performance but rather it is a satisfier that allows employees to meet personal or family needs. Additionally, the employee’s level of pay may reflect their status in the workplace. Paul (1985) agrees, stating that “...economic issues no longer serve as primary motivators” (p. 20). Further, Lawler (2000) feels that satisfaction with the reward is strongly influenced by the amount of the reward but is actually determined by more than simply the quantity.

Many authors indicated that the more effective motivators are actually rewards that have little or no monetary value. This was a concept that was reported by Grant (1984) who found that studies showed most workers value other types of rewards more than money. This concept was reinforced by Zemke (1988) “Of all the factors that help to create highly motivated and satisfied workers, the principal one appears to be that effective performance is recognized and rewarded in terms that are meaningful to the individual, whether financial, psychological or both” (p.50). Apparently, these concepts hold true today according to Clark (2000) who found that a large number of employees say that what they earn is not as important as how much they are appreciated for the work they do.

Finding the right motivator for personnel can be difficult because a motivator that is effective for one employee may not work for another (Paul, 1985). Additionally, Gorden et al. (1995) point out that “employees do not have the same interests at the same time, and the same employee may not have the same need over time. Hence, the same carrot will not work for everyone” (p.2)

Clark (2000) reduces the challenge for managers to a rather simple approach. “You can boil down employee motivation to one basic ideal: finding out what your employees want and finding a way to give it to them, or to enabling them to earn it” (p. 20).

However, motivation does not always guarantee high productivity. Grant (1984) feels that motivation is necessary condition for high productivity but may not be sufficient. There are other factors that figure into high productivity such as level of employee knowledge, level of employee skill, efficiency of work methods, and age of equipment. If these other factors are more prevalent, the motivation of the worker may not be sufficient to overcome them. Additionally, rewards or recognition can become a demotivator if not managed properly. If the

reward or recognition is almost guaranteed regardless of employee effort, this will serve as a demotivator to the employee because the employee does not value them. “Higher rewards will increase worker satisfaction. But increases in the absolute level of rewards, even when the rewards are highly valued, will not increase employees motivation when those rewards are assured regardless of employee effort.” (Grant, 1984, p.102) The employees may look at the rewards or recognition as entitlement for completing everyday tasks.

### Fire Service Publications

Review of fire service publications showed that many of the concerns and solutions concerning motivation could also be found in the public sector. Much of the problem of motivation in the fire service stems back to the old time thought money being the big motivator. Frequently, personnel have negotiated compensation based on length of time on the job and not on how well the employees perform the tasks of their respective positions (Hennessey, 1991).

Another antiquated method of employee recognition that was discussed was negative in nature. Henry (1995) states that “most fire chiefs are haunted by the ghosts of supervisors past. In other words, they treat subordinates as they were once treated” (p.12). Usually, the only time employees were ever recognized was when something went wrong. “Traditionally, the fire service has punished employees for organizational work violations such as absenteeism, tardiness, neglectful vehicle accidents, wrongful dispatching negligent decision making and deficient work performance.” (Henry, 1995, p.15). This method of motivation may have worked in other generations but is not effective with most current employees. Peal (1990) concurs noting that when discussing dispatchers, found that there were several reasons for job dissatisfaction

including “hearing infrequent positive comments, frequent negative feedback, unreasonable demands and lacking the feeling of being part of the team” (p.22).

Carter (1991) does not totally agree with Henry by stating that if management creates a stimulating workplace where people feel challenged and satisfied by the outcome of their efforts, the quality of their labor will increase in order to avoid the shame associated with nonfulfillment of accepted group performance and behavior. This statement indicates that negative recognition may be valuable in that people do not want to be singled out for unacceptable behavior.

Recently in the fire service, many authors have commented on the need for increasing the awareness of the concept of customer service. The fire service is a service oriented industry and with the recent threat of privatization in some areas, many have turned to customer service to combat this threat. When discussion turns to customers, two groups are identified. Much effort is focused on the external customers, for some feel they are the lifeblood of the organization. However, it is just as important to focus on the internal customers, the employees, as well. “Customer service must be a top priority in today’s emergency service organization. Both internal and external customers define our success as an emergency service organization” (Ozog, p.30). While it is important to concentrate on external customer satisfaction, an organization may not be able to attain this desired goal without internal customer satisfaction.

Another interesting benefit of positive reward noted was the value of the reward given to the person who gives the reward, not in a monetary sense of the reward but in the motivational sense. “The person who give the recognition will receive something positive in return.” (Hennessey, 1991, p.96). Hennessey is saying that people will want to work for someone who recognizes their value to the organization. These employees will be more motivated and possibly

have better morale, thus making the supervisor's job more pleasurable. Additionally, if the culture is developed that people are looking for those that are doing things right, employees will try to get caught doing just that.

In order to gain insight into the legalities of offering rewards to employees covered under a collective bargaining agreement, David J. Matty, Director of Law for the city of Solon was interviewed. In order to institute a program that contains monetary rewards, the program must first be negotiated into the collective bargaining agreement because the reward could be considered as income. Without negotiating the program first, it can not be instituted (D.J. Matty, personal communication, August 3, 2001).

The research clearly illustrates the benefits of reward or recognition programs. The old theory of "tell them to do it and it gets done" is clearly not effective with this generation and most likely future generations of employees as well. Additionally, money is not the motivator we once thought it was, it is simply a satisfier. To be a progressive fire service organization in a rapidly changing field, the fire service manager must find ways to motivate the employee, particularly to meet the increase in service types placed on us by our customers we serve.

While the necessity of such a program is clear, there are also some pitfalls that must be avoided. Making the rewards or recognition so easy to earn that they are thought of as entitlements could actually serve as a demotivator. Also, not matching the value of the reward or recognition to the needs of the employee will have a negative effect, thus eventually damaging the organization as a whole.

## **PROCEDURE**

The desired outcome of this research project was to create a rewards and recognition program to be utilized by the Solon Fire Department. In order to accomplish this, historical research was utilized in the literature review to discover the importance and advantages of having a rewards and recognition program. Most of this research was conducted at the Learning Resource Center of the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Additional literature was collected at the library of Lakeland Community College in Mentor, Ohio.

Descriptive research was also used to determine if area departments currently had a rewards or recognition program in place. A survey was developed to (a) determine the use of a reward or recognition program in other area departments, (b) determine the types of rewards and recognition instruments used, (c) determine the criteria used to select recipients of the reward or recognition and (d) determine negative factors that have resulted from using a reward or recognition program. A telephone survey was conducted of all 11 fire departments in the Chagrin Southeast region of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, between June 15, 2001 and July 15, 2001. These departments were chosen because they are used frequently by unionized employees as comparison cities during collective bargaining negotiations. Of these 11 departments, 8 (72.73%) responded. Of the respondent departments, 5 were career and 3 were combination career with part-paid personnel (Appendix A).

Additional descriptive research was used to determine if Solon Fire Rescue personnel would value a reward or recognition program. A survey was developed to (a) determine if the personnel of Solon Fire Rescue desire a reward or recognition program, (b) determine what types of rewards or recognition tools would be valuable to personnel, and (c) determine any potential negative aspects of a reward or recognition program. A survey was conducted of all 49

members of Solon Fire Rescue. Of the 49 personnel surveyed, 35 (71.43%) responded (Appendix B).

Action research was also utilized for this project. The information gathered during the historical and descriptive research phases was applied to develop a reward or recognition program for Solon Fire Rescue (Appendix C). The survey respondents within the department identified the basis of the rewards and recognition tools utilized.

## **RESULTS**

### **Answers to Research Questions**

#### **Question 1: How do other area fire departments utilize a reward or recognition program?**

As shown in Appendix A, 72.73% of the area departments responded to the survey. Of the responding departments, all had some type of recognition program for specific actions, usually heroic or related to an emergency incident. None of the departments surveyed had a consistent program promoting or motivating employees to act in a manner above the status quo of the department.

**Question 2: Do Solon Fire Rescue personnel feel recognition for their contribution to the organization is currently adequate?** For the purpose of this report, strongly agree and agree were figured as responses in agreement with the statement. Strongly disagree and disagree were figured as responses not in agreement with the statement. The neutral answers were not calculated into any of the following results. All results can be found in Appendix B.

From reviewing results of the employee survey, it appears that the majority of the employees feel that they are adequately recognized for their contributions to the organization. Overall, 68.57% feel that praise and acknowledgment for a job well done are strong motivational



tools. These are the current methods used now by the management team of Solon Fire Rescue. When referring to the level of recognition received from the administration of the department, 65.57% agree that the recognition is acceptable. This level of recognition jumps to 74.28% when referring to the level of recognition given by the employee's immediate supervisor. It is interesting to note that 54.86% of the respondents indicated that there is a lack of motivation in the organization. This figure appears to be higher than the dissatisfaction level of recognition given by the administration (31.43%) and the immediate supervisors (34.32%). The conclusion that may be drawn here is that for this organization, recognition from supervisors does not equal motivation.

Question 3: What types of recognition tools would be most desirable to Solon Fire Rescue personnel? Upon reviewing results of the employee survey, the majority of the respondents ranked additional promotional points (80%) as the most highly valued reward. Ranking a close second was a tie between receiving a gift (77.14%) and having family involved at the award presentation ceremony (77.14%). The third most valued reward was also a tie between the awarding of compensatory time off (74.28%) and awarding additional compensation (74.28%). Receiving tuition reimbursement (20%), media involvement in the awards ceremony (48.57%) and a positive letter in their personnel file (51.43%) were ranked as the least desirable motivational tools. Complete results can be found in Appendix B.

Question 4: What are the potential negatives to instituting an achievement recognition program? The results from the employee survey indicate that there are substantial concerns about the negative effects that could occur. The greatest concern is that the program would eventually become a popularity contest (42.85%). This would be a severe flaw that would devalue the program to a point of being ineffective. The second greatest concern was that the

program could lead to some type of favoritism (34.29%). Although a possibility, the concern over a reward or recognition program causing shift dissension was not as significant (22.86%).

In addition to the above mentioned negatives, Grant (1984) warns that personnel could become less productive as a result of concentrating too much effort in order to achieve the reward or recognition. “Long-term, excessive motivation can contribute to early “burn out”. Prolonged periods of extreme effort, accompanied by physical and psychological stress, are the source of numerous neuropsychological diseases”.

The one limitation of implementing the financial aspect of a reward or recognition program identified by the research is that this portion must first be negotiated into the collective bargaining agreement between the city and the unionized employees. The earliest opportunity for this to occur would be in 2003.

## **DISCUSSION**

The type of employee in today's fire service is different. Many times, fire officers lament that the kids of today don't listen well and are frequently asking questions. This is called a generation gap. The fact is that the employees of today, and in the future, are going to be different from their often-older supervisors. These individuals joined the fire service for different reasons than their supervisors. Thus, they will not react as expected by the supervisor to older motivation techniques.

Modern and progressive fire service organizations face many challenges today and in the future, not only in service delivery areas but employee relations as well. In order to meet the service delivery challenges and changes, it will be extremely important for fire service managers to embrace change in employee relations so that these service challenges can be met. This

change is necessary because employees are the greatest asset of an organization. “Employees have long been considered local government’s most powerful resource. The employee’s level of commitment and loyalty has a profound effect on his or her productivity – and that of the organization” (Gorden et al., 1995, p.1)

Motivating fire service employees early on in their career is usually not an extremely challenging venture. The manager is dealing with an individual who had to succeed at a rigorous testing process in a crowded field of applicants. As noted by Hennessey (1991), “When a person joins the fire service he or she is initially motivated simply by being part of the department, but early enthusiasm can wear thin with time. This is especially true if there is little or no room for advancement or other motivation” (p.96). However, after the initial glamour of the job wears thin, how does an organization retain that initial fervor for the position?

First, let’s identify the types of rewards that are available. According to Gross (1995) there are basically two types of rewards. The first is the recognition award, which values a contribution after it has occurred. The second is an incentive compensation, which gives the employee the opportunity to earn additional compensation before the performance is known. Incentive compensation programs are frequently associated with manufacturing industries, commonly referred to as piecework. These programs frequently cause increases in the amount of rewarded work that an employee completes, however, these systems are difficult to maintain and manage. (Lawler, 2000).

As the research of the immediate area to Solon Fire Rescue has shown, the recognition reward seems to be most prevalent. These rewards are presented to individuals who perform some type of heroic act. While these are extremely important acts to recognize, they do not occur with enough frequency to sustain a high level of motivation necessary to progress the

organization into the future. Arwood (1989) points this out by stating “the rewarding heroic actions is quite proper. However, when fire officials fail to recognize routine, day-to-day accomplishments of employees, they are setting the stage for lowered morale and negative behavioral response. Specifically, those behaviors, which the organization values yet takes for granted, will deteriorate” (p. 1). We have seen the focus of the fire service change from a predominantly fire response organization to an emergency medical services response organization, the opportunities for these heroic acts have decreased.

The rewards necessary to motivate employees need not be large or extravagant. “Research has shown that people are not motivated just by economic rewards, including salary and benefits, but also – and even more so – by non-economic rewards” (Gorden et al., 1995, p. 1). The employees of Solon Fire Rescue who indicated that additional points on a promotional examination would be their greatest motivator mirrored this idea to some extent. While a promotion can be interpreted as a financial gain, the fact remains that while many people receive the additional points, a limited number of recipients will benefit from the points. This form of motivation may be most productive however, because frequently personnel at the top of the promotion lists or the top performers in the department. What we would be trying to accomplish from this motivation is aligning the organization’s values and mission with that of the employee’s. Zemke (1998) indicates that this is important in the private sector as well by noting “exemplary companies in the service sector realize that while pay may ensure attendance, it typically doesn’t produce strategic alignment, personal enthusiasm or outstanding performance” (p. 49). Employees that are motivated will be more inclined to buy into and work towards the values and mission of the organization.

The fire service faces some of the same challenges that the private sector faces when it comes to employee retention and achievement. In the private sector, employees who are not motivated will likely switch companies, taking with them valuable information about the competition. While we in the municipal fire service are not in competition with each other over services offered, it is in the best interest of an organization to retain employees. Much time, effort, and money are spent on training employees to be prepared for the many types of service requests they will respond to. When the employee leaves the organization, so does the time, effort and money invested. “In order to remain competitive and retain high achievers, local government employers have the same needs as private employers to reward high performance” (Hall and Moulder, 1995, p. 7)

Solon Fire Rescue has been successful until now in attracting employees, retaining employees, and making progress in expanding the overall size and types of services delivered to the community. These successes have been accomplished with little or no reward or recognition program in place. However, the organization can not rest on its successful past to ensure its future. The organization is in the process of expanding from a staff of 45 line personnel to 57 line personnel. This will cause greater financial strain on the community’s resources. Further, the economy has been strong but has recently shown signs of decline. These two factors, department growth and the decline of the economy have caused concern within the administration as to the continued success of the department.

The organization could continue with its current mode of operation in relation to employee motivation and make no changes. The results of this decision could eventually prove to be extremely harmful. As changes are expected of the organization or forced on the organization, an employee pool that is aligned with the values and mission of the organization

will be critical for success. Without this alignment, the organization will be challenged to achieve success, thus potentially damaging its reputation and financial backing from the community.

The second option is for the organization to formulate an employee reward or recognition program. The impact of this type of plan will be increased employee morale and increased employee participation. Additionally, it could lead to an overall improvement in the caliber of individual succeeding in obtaining promotions.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Solon Fire Rescue needs to begin to take the steps to institute the reward or recognition plan outlined in Appendix C as soon as possible. Working with the city of Solon Human Resource Department, the non-financial aspects of this plan should be in place by April 1, 2002. Additionally, Solon Fire Rescue administration should immediately pursue a Civil Service rule change to modify the method to award additional points on promotional examinations. Further, Solon Fire Rescue administration should constantly keep in mind that family involvement was considered important by the employees, and thus should make arrangements for the family members to be present at all awards ceremonies.

The financial aspects of the program should be instituted by January 1, 2004. This will be the earliest day allowable by the collective bargaining agreement. Additionally, Solon Fire Rescue administration should prepare the fiscal year 2004 budget to account for an increase in expenditures to implement the program.

The two phased approach of this plan offers substantial benefit to the organization. The immediate benefit to the department is that the program will begin to provide motivational tools

for use by supervisors to recognize employees for the positive actions taken on a day to day basis. This will allow supervisors to become comfortable and accustomed to motivating their employees. It will also allow the organization time to fine-tune the program prior to committing significant financial resources for the second phase.

The long-term benefit will be that the organization will have a motivated employee group that is willing to meet the challenges and changes of the fire service, thus providing a higher level of safety to the community.

## REFERENCES

- Arwood, R.B. (1989, Fall). Positive Reinforcement – The Manager’s Secret Tool to Enhance Employee Motivation. Speaking of fire, 1 – 3.
- Carter, H.R. (1991, July). Motivation and Self-Direction. Firehouse, 23.
- Clark, T. (2000, November). Employee Incentives: can you make them work for you? Public Safety Communications, 52 – 53.
- Curtis, K., & Manning, G. (1988). Performance Managing For Excellence. Cincinnati: Vista Systems.
- Gorden, G., Bjornlund, L., & Zahiruddin, A. (1995). Employee Motivation: Getting P.A.I.D. for Productivity. ICMA Management Information Service Report, 27, 1 –9.
- Grant, P. (1984). Motivation: Myths and Misnomers. In J. Matzer Jr. (Ed.), Creative Personnel Practices: New Ideas for Local Government (pp. 99 – 103). Washington, DC: International City Management Association.
- Gross, S.E. (1995). Compensation for teams. New York: American Management Association.
- Hall, G. & Moulder, E.R. (1995). Performance Appraisals and Compensation Programs in Local Government. Special Data Issue, 7, 6 – 9.
- Hennessey, J.M. (1991, September). Motivating firefighters with incentives. Fire Chief, 95 – 96.
- Henry, S. (1995, April). Motivating the Fire Service: Positive versus Negative Reinforcement. American Fire Journal, 12 – 16.



Lawler, E. E. (2000). Rewarding Excellence: Pay Strategies for the New Economy. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Luthy, J. (1998, March). New Keys to Employee Performance and Productivity. Public Management. 4 – 8.

Ozog, J.E. (1995, August). Customer Service: Staff Members are the Key. Responder. 30 – 31.

Peal, N.J. (1990, October). The ups and downs of dispatching. American Fire Journal. 22.

Paul, A.C. (1985, November). Motivating Local Government Employees with Incentives. Public Management. 20 – 22.

Zemke, R. (1998, November). Rewards and Recognition: Yes, They Really Work. Training. 49 – 53.

## APPENDIX A

### PHONE SURVEY RESULTS OF FIRE DEPARTMENTS IN SOUTHEAST REGION OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY, OHIO

#### Questions:

1. Do you utilize a reward or recognition program for your employees?
2. What are employees rewarded or recognized for?
3. How often is the employee rewarded or recognized?
4. What is the reward tool utilized?

#### Results:

	REPLY	QUESTION 1	QUESTION 2	QUESTION 3	QUESTION 4
Bedford	Y	Y	Bravery	As needed	Plaque
Bedford Hts.	Y	Y	Courage	Per incident	Plaque
Chagrin Falls	Y	Y	Special Deed	By incident	Certificate or Plaque
Garfield Hts.	Y	Y	Bravery	As needed	Medal
Highland Hills	N				
Maple Hts.	Y	Y	Courage	Per incident	Plaque/Medal
Northfield	N				
Oakwood	Y	Y	Bravery	As needed	Plaque
Orange	Y	Y	Bravery	By incident	Certificate or Plaque
Solon	Y	Y	Special Deed	By incident	Certificate or Plaque
Warrensville Hts.	N				

**APPENDIX B**

**SOLON FIRE RESCUE**

**REWARD / RECOGNITION PROGRAM SURVEY**

This survey has been developed by Chief Shaw for a National Fire Academy Applied Research Project. The results of this survey will be used in determining the implementation of a reward/recognition program.

Please read the following statements. Place a small check mark in the box of each statement that represents your honest opinion. *DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS SURVEY.* Thank you for your participation.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1. I feel there is a lack of motivation in Solon Fire Rescue	7 (20%)	12 (34.86%)	4 (11.43%)	5 (14.29%)	7 (20%)
2. I feel praise and acknowledgment for a job well done are strong motivational tools	9 (25.71%)	15 (42.86%)	6 (17.14%)	4 (11.43%)	1 (2.85%)
3. I receive recognition from Administration for a job well done	6 (17.14%)	18 (51.43%)	5 (14.29%)	3 (8.57%)	3 (8.57%)
4. I receive recognition from my immediate supervisor for a job well done	10 (28.57%)	16 (45.71%)	6 (17.14%)	5 (14.29%)	1 (2.85%)
5. I feel change is important to make this department better	17 (48.57%)	12 (34.86%)	3 (8.57%)	2 (5.71%)	1 (2.85%)

6. I would serve on an employee Quality Circle group if asked	4 (11.43%)	9 (25.71%)	14 (40%)	10 (28.57%)	2 (5.71%)
7. I feel tuition reimbursement is important to me	3 (8.57%)	4 (11.43%)	4 (11.43%)	20 (57.14%)	4 (11.43%)
8. I feel a positive letter/memo in my personnel file would be a valuable motivator	7 (20%)	11 (31.43%)	9 (25.71%)	5 (14.29%)	3 (8.57%)
9. I feel a plaque would be a valuable motivator	11 (31.43%)	9 (25.71%)	7 (20%)	6 (17.14%)	2 (5.71%)
10. I feel a gift would be a valuable motivator	11 (31.43%)	16 (45.71%)	4 (11.43%)	2 (5.71%)	2 (5.71%)
11. I feel a citation/medal would be a valuable motivator	14 (40%)	10 (28.57%)	7 (20%)	2 (5.71%)	2 (5.71%)
12. I feel money would be a valuable motivator	15 (42.86%)	11 (31.43%)	5 (14.29%)	1 (2.85%)	3 (8.57%)
13. I feel comp time would be a valuable motivator	17 (48.57%)	9 (25.71%)	6 (17.14%)	1 (2.85%)	2 (5.71%)
14. I feel additional points on a promotional would be a valuable motivator	19 (54.29%)	9 (25.71%)	3 (8.57%)	1 (2.85%)	3 (8.57%)
15. I feel having my family involved in a presentation ceremony would be a valuable motivator	15 (42.86%)	12 (34.86%)	6 (17.14%)	1 (2.85%)	1 (2.85%)
16. I feel having media coverage of an award received would be a valuable motivator	9 (25.71%)	8 (22.86%)	13 (37.14%)	3 (8.57%)	2 (5.71%)
17. I think the Chief should choose award recipients	7 (20%)	11 (31.43%)	8 (22.86%)	5 (14.29%)	4 (11.43%)

18. I think an officer review board should choose award recipients	13 (37.14%)	10 (28.57%)	6 (17.14%)	4 (11.43%)	2 (5.71%)
98. I think an outside agency (Rotary, Lions, Kiwanas, etc.) should choose award recipients	11 (31.43%)	14 (40%)	6 (17.14 %)	3 (8.57%)	1 (2.85%)

Please read the following statements. Place a small check mark in the box of each statement that represents your honest opinion.

	HIGHLY PROBABLE	PROBABLE	NEUTRAL	UNPROBABLE	HIGHLY UNPROBABLE
20. An awards program could lead to favoritism	3 (8.57%)	2 (5.71%)	7 (20%)	14 (40%)	9 (25.71%)
21. An awards program could result in a popularity contest	6 (17.14%)	4 (11.43%)	8 (22.86%)	7 (20%)	10 (28.57%)
22. An awards program could lead to dissension on a shift	4 (11.43%)	4 (11.43%)	4 (11.43%)	15 (42.86%)	8 (22.86%)

## **APPENDIX C**

### **SOLON FIRE RESCUE 9-11 RECOGNITION AND REWARD PROGRAM**

**Purpose:** The purpose of the Solon Fire Rescue 9-11 recognition and reward program is to recognize those individuals who exemplify and exhibit the vision and values of the organization.

**Eligibility:** Any member of Solon Fire Rescue is eligible to receive an award.

#### **Levels of Awards:**

**REP Award (Green Sheet):** Presented to a member for exceptional performance in an emergency or non-emergency situation. A copy of this award will be placed in the personnel file of the recipient.

**Everyday Hero Award:** Presented to a member who has been nominated by his/her shift for exemplary conduct or actions during a calendar month.

**Hero Award:** Presented to a member who has previously received an Everyday Hero Award in recognition of his/her accomplishments over the previous 12 month period.

The following guidelines shall be followed by all personnel for the 9-11 award program:

**REP Award (Green Sheet):** Any supervisor may fill out a green sheet to compliment a member of the department on a job well done. This can be completed for an emergency or non-emergency situation. An employee can accumulate these awards without limits.

**Everyday Hero Award:** Each shift shall nominate one employee each month for this award. Nominations shall be in writing and shall be submitted to the Chief's office by the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the following month. The awards committee prior to the 20th day of that same month shall review the nominations. Nominations shall be made for exemplary conduct or actions for emergency or non-emergency situations. Heroic actions at emergency scenes shall not be eligible for this award as they are recognized in another program. Areas that may be used to evaluate personnel include, but are not limited to; job performance, training, sick time usage, promptness, appearance, cooperation with others, etc. The recipient of this award shall have his/her name entered on the plaque and also receive a gift award valued at no more than \$25.00.

**Hero Award:** Each recipient of the Everyday Hero Award shall be automatically nominated for the annual Hero Award. Additional information, if requested by the awards committee, shall be submitted no later than January 15<sup>th</sup> of the following year. Heroic actions at emergency scenes shall not be eligible for this award as they are recognized in another program. The recipient of

this award shall have his/her name entered on the Hero Award plaque, shall receive a personal hero award, and shall receive a gift award valued at \$100.00.